

Introductory Note: Recovery celebration events grew throughout the first decade of the 21st century—from a handful of fledgling recovery marches that drew a few hundred people in 2000 to more than 100,000 recovering people and their families and friends participating in more than 200 recovery month celebration events during September 2010. Faces and Voices of Recovery provided central coordination of these events and designated one event each year in a different city to be the “national hub” event. The 2010 hub event was held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The event drew more than 11,000 people who participated in a public march followed by speakers, entertainment and recovery-focused informational booths at Penn’s Landing. Two moments stand out in this event for me. The first was a point in the march on Market Street where the march crested a bridge revealing recovering people as far as the eyes could see before me and behind me. The second was a scene of a woman in her 60s wearing a purple honor guard sash noting her 39 years of recovery sitting on a step beside the march in private counsel with a young woman whose sign at her feet said simply “89 days.” The former image was something I never thought I would see in my lifetime; the latter stood as a poignant portrait of the very essence of the recovery advocacy and peer recovery support movement. Below are my brief remarks to the crowd that day.

Today We Stand

William L. White

PRO-ACT Recovery Walks 2010
National Rally for Recovery Site
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Philadelphia Pennsylvania

I speak to you this morning as a person in long-term addiction recovery and as a recovery historian, and am particularly delighted to do so from the city I think of as the recovery capital of the world. No city has devoted more resources to the promotion and celebration of recovery or done more to mobilize recovering people and their families as a healing force than has the City of Philadelphia. This would not have been possible without the strong support of Mayor Michael Nutter, the vision of Dr. Arthur Evans, Jr., the tenaciousness of Bev Haberle and other local recovery

advocates, and the national leadership of people like Pat Taylor, Carol McDaid, Dr. Tom McLellan, and Dr. Westley Clark.

Although Dr. Benjamin Rush first wrote from this city in 1794 that addiction was a medical rather than moral problem, it wasn't until the National Council on Alcoholism's Operation Understanding in 1976 that 52 prominent Americans publicly declared their long-term recovery from alcoholism. But the faces of First Ladies and other dignitaries in recovery disappeared from television screens and newspaper headlines amidst the restigmatization, demedicalization, and recriminalization of addiction in the 1980s and 1990s.

Ten years ago, I wrote of a new recovery advocacy movement rising in the United States. I described the simple but transformative ideas that were emerging from new and renewed grassroots recovery advocacy organizations. In the earliest days of this movement, we announced that addiction recovery is a reality in the lives of millions of individuals and families, and we offered ourselves as living proof of that proclamation. We noted the many pathways to addiction recovery and declared that all should be cause for celebration. We observed that recovery flourishes in supportive communities, and we affirmed that recovery gives back what addiction has taken from individuals, families, and communities.

In October 2001, recovery advocates from around the United States met in St. Paul, Minnesota, to craft the future of this movement through the leadership of Faces and Voices of Recovery. We spoke of a day when recovering people and their families and friends would mass as far as the eye could see in cities across the country. We spoke of a day when families who had lost a loved one to addiction would march to save others. We spoke of a coming day when people with days of recovery would march beside men and women with decades of recovery. We spoke of a day when those in Twelve Step fellowships would march arm-in-arm with people in secular and religious pathways of recovery. We spoke of a day when people whose recoveries began in therapeutic communities would stand in fraternity with people in methadone-assisted recovery—all of us putting aside our differences and celebrating the growing varieties and styles of recovery experience. We even envisioned a day when people in recovery from countries around the world would stand collectively to carry the advocacy torch.

That day, which we thought would take decades to achieve, has arrived. We stand today as the living fulfillment of that vision. Today, I received an email that 200 recovering people and their families marched the streets of Tokyo this week in Japan's first ever recovery march. Today, we

stand, here and abroad, reaching across geographical, political, racial, and cultural barriers, to mobilize our growing numbers and influence. Today, we stand to reach our goal of engaging those who still suffer and creating a world in which recovery is supported and celebrated. Today, we stand to remind ourselves and to send a message to those still wounded: Recovery is contagious. If you want it, you have to get close to it and stay close to it. You have to catch it and keep catching it. And you have to pass it on to others!

For far too long we have knelt with bowed heads, not in humility or prayer, but in shame. Today, we stand as one—in our gratitude for the fruits of recovery and in our commitment to service. Today, we stand to write the future of addiction recovery in America.

Today, we stand.